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ABSTRACT

This report reviews the literature pertaining to parent and caregiver attitudes, values, and practices, and their effects on children. Topics include: (1) child care selection; (2) assessment of continuity between the home and day care; (3) communication between parents and caregivers; (4) variables which affect communication; (5) parent and caregiver attitudes; (6) parent and caregiver roles which are assigned by society; (7) parent and caregiver views on the role of day care; (8) parent participation in day care and obstacles to such participation. The report suggests that parents' participation in the activities of their children's day care facility, and communication between parents and caregivers, are minimal. Even though parents and caregivers have differing expectations for each other, they appear to be satisfied with their relationship. A list of 50 references concludes the report. (RJC)

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Parents and Day Care: The Search for an Alliance

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Abstract

Parents who use child care spend little time in activities associated with their facility and engage in minimal communication with the people who care for their children on a daily basis. Parents and caregivers often have different expectations of one another and of child care. Yet they appear satisfied with existing relationships between them, despite the potential discontinuity for children between their two most significant socializing environments. We must work to define the crucial elements of a meaningful parent/caregiver alliance, and study ways to integrate these into each type of child care setting.

Parents and Child Care: The Search for an Alliance

More families with young children are relying on day care than ever before. The result is that many children are experiencing at least two primary socializing environments, often beginning in infancy. Both research and conventional wisdom have posited that coordination between aspects of the socialization community is essential to avoid fragmentation and discontinuity for the child. Potential areas of discontinuity between the home and child care center include childrearing practices, especially models of appropriate behavior and disciplinary practices; developmental goals and expectations; cultural values and language patterns; and scope and affectivity of interpersonal relationships (Powell, 1980). Horizontal collaboration (that which might occur between the family and child care center) would seem to facilitate the development of young children as they continually move between socialization environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lippitt, 1968).

Translating these theoretical perspectives into a practical assignment is a task which is far from complete. While the need for a partnership between parents and day caregivers has been clearly documented (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980; Fein, 1980; Peters & Benn, 1980; Peters & Klein, 1981; Powell, 1977a, 1977b, 1978, 1980, 1987; Shapiro, 1977; Walsh & Deitchman, 1980; Winter & Peters, 1974; Zigler & Turner, 1982), the specific components of such a partnership that will result in positive outcomes for the child and family are still unclear.

Similarly, there is a widely held assumption that considerable discontinuity currently exists between the home and child care environments and that this discontinuity results in confusion and negative consequences for children. In reality, however, little work has addressed the extent of congruence between attitudes, values, and practices of parents and caregivers, and even less has looked at what difference it actually makes in the lives of children. In this paper we will review the literature pertaining to these issues and attempt to extract the elements of a meaningful parent/caregiver partnership.

Selecting Child Care

Choosing child care is a complex process for most parents, who must consider factors such as cost, convenience, and practical features of the setting, as well as program and caregiver characteristics (Turner & Gallegos, 1984; Turner & Smith, 1983). Ideally, one would assume that parents choose child care arrangements that are consistent in philosophy and practice with their own value systems. Another logical assumption is that if parents value continuity and congruence, they would consider the degree to which a day care setting encourages parent involvement when they make their selection. If these suppositions are true, then actual discontinuity between home and day care should be minimal. Somewhat surprisingly, most of the existing data do not support these assumptions. For example, 62% of the 354 parents surveyed by Romero and Thomas (1975) said that opportunities to take part in the program and to influence program policy were not important in choosing their day care center. Similarly, in the National Child Care Consumer Study (Rodes &

Moore, 1975) parents were asked to rank order factors important in selecting a child care center. Of 29 factors, "Has my views on childrearing" ranked 14th, after availability, cleanliness, cost, nap, food, etc. In fact, it was named as the least important factor by approximately 1/5 of the sample. In the same study, "Parent involvement in the program" ranked 23rd of the 29 factors, and "Parents can get basic information" ranked 27th.

These and other studies suggest that parent involvement and even parent/caregiver congruence may not initially be salient factors. Therefore, it would be erroneous to assume that a significant proportion of discontinuity is ruled out by the selection process itself. Pettygrove (1987) made the observation that parental preferences have limited impact so long as parents must make choices restricted by problems of supply and cost and have little information on program quality and options.

The type of day care setting a parent chooses, however, may say something about the importance of continuity to him or her. There is some evidence that family day care homes provide the environment for a close parent/caregiver relationship. For example, since family day care providers operate within a home (like parents) and share similar work to parents, they may be more likely to exchange information and to listen and share experiences, much like a neighbor. In fact, parent/caregiver communication in day care homes has been characterized generally as an informal friendship (Davison, 1980). This can be contrasted to the typical professional behavior expected of center staff, such as

discussing aspects of the program and providing referrals (Hughes, 1985). Finally, parents have reported that shared attitudes in childrearing and discipline are important in their choice of a family day care arrangement (Davison, 1980; Innes & Innes, 1984; Long & Garduque, 1987; Popplewell & Winget, 1980; Steinberg & Green, 1979).

It should be noted that research related to the parent/caregiver alliance in family day care has methodological limitations. For example, samples have been drawn from limited populations, data collection has consisted primarily of the interview method, and few replication studies have been conducted. It is probable that parents who choose family day care are different in substantive ways from parents who choose center-based care, i.e., they have different expectations from the day care setting at the outset. Therefore, it is not surprising that they would develop different relationships with the caregivers in the two settings and also that the caregivers themselves might possess different characteristics. Much more research is needed to gain further insight into these differences, and into why parents choose a particular child care arrangement in the first place.

Assessing Continuity

The research that has attempted to assess continuity betweeen parents and caregivers has been of two types. One focuses on the degree and type of communication, using indirect measures such as actual time parents spend in child care centers and the extent and diversity of communication patterns. The second area of research compares parent and

caregiver attitudes about childrearing, child development, and child care, arriving at a more direct assessment of congruency in belief systems. The data in both areas are limited and inconsistent.

Communication

Zigler and Turner (1982) recorded the total amount of time 50 sets of parents spent in a day care center over a period of 70 consecutive weekdays. Recorded time included dropping off and picking up children, formal and informal conferences, parent group meetings, observation of children, etc. Although the center studied was one of exceptionally high quality that had an open-door policy and strongly encouraged parent involvement, parents (mostly mothers) spent an average of only 7.4 minutes per day in all activities combined.

Hughes (1985) interviewed 38 child care providers representing 17 centers. The caregivers reported spending an average of slightly more than 13 minutes each week (less than 3 minutes per day) with each parent and 98 minutes each week with all parents combined. In 65% of the centers some parents were involved in center management; in 62% parents helped with special activities; 94% of the centers kept parents informed though occasional newsletters; and 88% reported some participation in parent training programs and parent/caregiver conferences. While these percentages are relatively high, it is not clear what proportion of parents participated with what degree of frequency in the various activities.

Romero and Thomas (1975) surveyed 236 staff at 23 day care centers as well as a random sample of 354 parents utilizing these centers. Interestingly, the staff believed that communication with parents was essential for effective supplemental care, but parents did not share this belief. Caregivers indicated that they talked to most parents about the day care center between once or twice a week and once or twice a month. However, 17% indicated that they never talked to parents about the center and nearly one-fourth never sent information home regarding current programs. Nevertheless, parents reported general satisfaction with their centers.

The National Day Care Study (Abt Associates, 1979) reported that about one-fourth of the parents surveyed did not involve themselves in any way with their child's center. Approximately two-thirds of the parents came to the center at some time for conferences, observation, social events, or educational activities, but only about 1% were involved in decision-making roles. The most common type of parent involvement was informal communication with caregivers, especially with parents of infants. Only 23% of the parents reported that they took advantage of the center's educational activities, but 52% (more than twice those who actually participated) stated that they wanted to learn more effective ways of raising children. The reasons for poor participation despite the desire for learning are not clear. They could range from content to timing to the fact that parents were unaware of the opportunities for learning.

Perhaps the most comprehensive work in the area of parent/caregiver relationships was conducted by Powell (1977a, 1977b, 1978, 1980, 1987). His data were gathered from 89 caregivers and 212 parents from 12 day care centers. The strength of his work lies in the depth of inquiry rather than in the breadth of population.

Powell found direct communication between parents and caregivers to be the most important aspect of the parent/caregiver alliance, with the highest frequency of communication occurring at drop-off and pick-up times. Other forms of communication, such as telephone conversations, conferences, and home visits were far less frequent. Approximately two-thirds of the parents communicated with the same caregiver consistently, and child-related topics were discussed more frequently than parent- or family-related topics. The greater the frequency of communication, the greater the diversity of topics, suggesting that conversation between parents and caregivers may facilitate a sense of trust to discuss more personal issues. However, Powell noted that much of the interpersonal exchange appeared to be superficial in content. In fact, he found a negative correlation between amount of communication and congruence in childrearing beliefs between parents and caregivers. Apparently, the issue of communication as it relates to congruency is a complex one and cannot be explained by frequency alone.

Like other researchers, Powell found that parents were more satisfied with the level of communication than were caregivers. Only about half the parents considered the child care center as a source of information for childrearing, and the majority did not believe that the

center should be kept informed of family activities on a continual basis. In short, Powell concluded that fragmentation and discontinuity between home and center do exist, and that these boundaries are sharply defined and narrow in intersection.

Variables Related to Communication

Studies of parent/caregiver communication have often examined demographic variables, which are relatively easy to assess. Powell (1977a) found that communication was more frequent for parents who had used the center for 6 months or less or were from intact families. Increased diversity of topics was also related to being new to the center, as well as to higher socioeconomic status (SES). Not related to frequency or diversity were distance from home to center, previous day care experience, and number of centers visited prior to enrollment. In results not directly comparable, Zigler and Turner (1982) found that smaller families, having younger children, and lower SES were related to increased amounts of time spent on-site at the center. Somewhat inconsistent with Powell's findings, family intactness and length of time using the center were not related, nor was the number of hours parents worked.

For caregivers, Powell (1977a) found increased frequency and diversity of communication were related to recent completion of formal education, fewer years of experience in working with young children, and job position (director, teacher, or aide). Hughes (1985) also found that higher education correlated with talking to more parents, but for a

shorter period of time. In this study, age of caregivers related to communicaion patterns. Older caregivers talked with fewer parents, but age was unrelated to the total amount of time spent talking with parents. In terms of diversity, younger caregivers discussed more serious topics whereas more highly educated caregivers discussed typical problems and routine information more often. Age and education were also related to the types of "helping strategies" caregivers used with parents.

These results obviously say as much about the variables associated with communication patterns as they do about characteristics that are not related. Powell attempted to look beyond demographics and treat the parent/caregiver relationship as an interpersonal one. He saw the attitudes of both parties as significant to the communication system. For example, he found that increased frequency and diversity of communication were related to the attitude that parents and caregivers should discuss family information and childrearing values. He also found that parents who actively participated in an informal network of parents using the center, and caregivers who reported friendship relationships with parents outside the center, had higher frequencies of communication. Nearly one-third of the caregivers reported knowing some parents before their children were enrolled, and nearly one-fourth considered one or more of the parents as friends (Powell, 1977a).

Similarly, Joffee (1977) found evidence of an "underlife" where child care staff provided a range of informal services negotiated privately with individual parents, including after-school chauffering,

"rapping," legal and medical advice. Such activities go beyond the boundaries of standard center fare and surely contribute to the parent/caregiver relationship. Other variables, such as physical arrangement of the center, staffing patterns that predict caregivers' availability to parents, first impressions, and other direct and indirect messages that center staff and parents convey to one another also affect the communication and the interpersonal relationship that will ultimately develop (or fail to develop). At this point, these variables are intuitively rather than empirically assumed to be important.

Parent and Caregiver Attitudes

More to the point of continuity are the few studies that have examined parent and caregiver attitudes. Innes and Innes (1984) believed that the most obvious source of stress between homes and centers lies in the potential conflicts between adults who form attachments to the same child. They predicted that caregivers' attitudes toward parents would be related to their social role identity, i.e., whether they perceived themselves as being in the role of mother, grandmother, babysitter, or teacher. They also thought that role identity would be associated with training and with the professional role of the caregiver, i.e., a center director, center teacher, or a family day care provider.

Though the sample was small (N=31), the researchers did, in fact, find a strong relationship between social role, professional role, and

degree of training. For example, caregivers who perceived their role as mother tended to feel that children should be in day care only if the parents worked, whereas those who viewed themselves as teacher felt that day care could be beneficial to children. "Mother" role caregivers tended to express hostility toward parents based on perceived neglect of children, whereas "teacher" role caregivers either expressed no hostility at all, or were upset over parents' failing to reinforce learning at home. About 71% of the caregivers expressed some hostility toward parents, but there was no relation between source of hostility and professional role. Finally, almost half of the caregivers felt that child care is totally for the child; another one-quarter gave parents' needs minor consideration; and only 25% gave equal consideration to serving the needs of parents and children. Unfortunately, this study did not include a parallel examination of parents' attitudes.

Several studies have directly compared parent and caregiver attitudes on childrearing and child care, but results have been inconsistent. Wilson (1979) surveyed 394 parents and 62 teachers in 19 day care centers and found no significant differences in attitudes between the two groups. Similarly, Horner (1977) surveyed 70 parents and 30 staff members and found no substantial discrepancies in their evaluations of a number of child behavior characteristics. Even when parents subjectively perceived some dissonance, their satisfaction with the day care program was not affected.

Stewart and Stone (1977) also found overall agreement in attitudes between parents and practitioners. These investigators administered a

questionnaire to 374 Anglo, Black, and Chicano parents, 364 child care practitioners, and 52 early childhood professionals. There was considerable agreement in responses to acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in children, but parents scorned disobedience to a greater extent than did caregivers. In terms of program goals, Anglo parents were closer in agreement to caregivers (both groups stressing the creative aspects of the program) than were Black and Chicano parents, who valued more academic activities. A greater percentage of the minority group parents were involved in the parent education aspects of the center, and a significantly larger percentage of Black parents wanted a broad relationship with the center, including working with and learning from it. However, Browne (1982) found that parents and teachers in a primarily Black child care center differed somewhat on the center's guidelines and policies and differed significantly in the area of discipline, but no relationship was found between the level of agreement and participation in center activities.

The issue of incongruence in attitudes as it relates to social class and/or ethnicity was also noted by Joffee (1977), who described the Berkeley early childhood centers. Black parents perceived the program as an educational institution and wanted their children to learn the role of "student" in an academic curriculum, with a deemphasis on the role of parents in the program. They also wanted firmer discipline than Anglo parents.

Hess, Price, Dickson, and Conroy (1981) compared mothers and early childhood practitioners with respect to their goals, socialization

pressures, control strategies, and interaction with young children. Their data revealed a similar general pattern for the two groups, but teachers ranked independence and expressive activities as more important than did mothers, and mothers ranked social skills as more important than did teachers. The two groups were more in agreement as to what is important in the child's development than they were as to what should be emphasized in the classroom. Mothers expected mastery of skills at earlier ages, and their methods of control relied more heavily on appeals to authority, whereas teachers appealed to rules, or relied on the impersonal use of authority that invoked the norms of the program. Interestingly, each group believed that the types of appeal used by the other were appropriate, suggesting that the differences might represent a normative definition of the two roles. Mothers and teachers used quite different methods in dealing with and teaching children, but their effectiveness in teaching and communicating was the same.

Kontos and her associates focused on the attitudes of caregivers toward parents and on the perceptions of both groups about parenting. In one study (Kontos, Raikes, & Woods, 1983), 236 staff from day care, preschool, and Head Start programs were surveyed. The data indicated that: (1) relative to their own concept of "good parenting," early childhood staff expressed negative attitudes about their center's parents, but expressed even more negative attitudes about parents in general; (2) staff in centers serving low or heterogeneous income families were more negative about their parents' childrearing practices than those serving high and middle-income families; (3) staff whose

income was unlike parents' income were more negative than staff whose earnings were similar to parents'; (4) more highly educated staff generally had more positive attitudes toward their parents' childrearing than less-educated staff; (5) staff who were working with many single and/or minority parents had more negative attitudes; (6) older and more experienced caregivers had more positive attitudes than younger, less experienced caregivers. However, judging from the statistical analyses, characteristics of center clientele were more potent variables than staff characteristics in predicting attitudes.

A second study (Kontos, 1984) extended and partially replicated these results, but the sample was limited to day care settings. The negative attitudes of staff toward parents found in the first study were confirmed. While both groups had similar views of "good parenting," parents considered themselves closer to the ideal than they were perceived by staff. It should be noted that staff judgements were of all parents using their facility, but only about half of the parents constituted the parent sample, possibly skewing the data.

A logical assumption is that negative staff attitudes toward parents may detract from the optimal development of children and interfere with the supportive potential of day care. However, the empirical data to support this belief are virtually nonexistent. Kontos and Wells (1986) studied how staff members' attitudes affect their day-to-day interactions with parents and children. Child care staff from four centers rated their clients on parenting practices. A sample was then obtained of parents held in high esteem by staff (N=20) and

parents held in low esteem (N=16), based on quality of childrearing techniques or beliefs, frequency and type of communication, and adherence to center policies and regulations.

Differences between the two parent groups were found in communication patterns. For parents held in low esteem (the low group), the content of communication with caregivers was highly role oriented, limite. , the child's behavior in the center. Parents held in high esteem (high group) tended to establish more personal relationships with the staff. Low-group parents were less well-educated, more likely to be divorced, and reported fewer family support systems. Still, they did not view the child care center as a support system for themselves, and tended to report a greater number of problems with center staff, especially regarding center policies and regulations.

Despite these differences, the attitudes of the parents were remarkably similar. Both groups valued highly qualified day care staff who care about children; neither group expected the center to play any larger role than caring for and educating their children; most parents reported daily communication with staff and perceived staff as accessible; and both groups reported high satisfaction with their day care centers. Further, 94% of parents in each group believed that congruence in childrearing between home and school was important. However, when parents were asked to describe how they and center staff would handle certain child behaviors, discrepancies in responses existed. The authors concluded that while the subjective perceptions of day care were similar for parents held in either high or low esteem by

staff, the objective reality in terms of communication patterns, conflict, and available support was different.

To determine whether children experience day care differently as a function of staff attitudes toward their parents, 17 children whose mothers were held in high esteem by caregivers and 10 children whose mothers were held in low esteem were observed. The context variables of teacher role, group size, and teacher verbal response were considered. Few differences in the day care experiences of the children were found, and where differences did occur, they were in favor of the low-group children. For example, caregivers were less frequently absent from the setting where low-group children were observed, and they tended to engage in more social conversation with them. In general, the study suggested that negative staff attitudes did not relate to parent perceptions of their affective relationship to the center or to the child's actual experiences.

The basic questions, how much discontinuity exists between parents and caregivers and what difference it actually makes, are not adequately answered by research thus far. For example, it is difficult to tie specific demographic characteristics of parents and of staff to communication patterns and to the issue of continuity. Parent variables considered in the preceding studies include SES, ethnicity, length of affiliation with the center, family intactness, and work status. Staff variables included age, experience, training, education, social role perception, professional role status, and congruity of income level with parent population. Little consistency is evident for any of these

variables across studies in terms of their relative importance in the parent/caregiver relationship.

The research does show there may be more similarity between parents and caregivers than has been assumed -- discontinuity may be more imagined than real. There is also the strong suggestion in the available, though meager, data that the degree of discontinuity that does exist may make less difference to parents and children than professionals have traditionally believed. Parents may perceive more congruence than actually exists, but even when they recognize dissonance between themselves and caregivers, it does not necessarily reduce their satisfaction with the center. And even when caregivers have negative attitudes about parents, this does not necessarily interfere with positive interactions with children.

Differential Roles for Parents and Caregivers

Several investigators have taken the position that a certain amount of dissonance between parents and teachers is a natural outcome of role differentiation assigned by society. For example, Lightfoot (1975) pointed out that parents can have definite expectations for their children because of their primary relationship with them and because a family has a limited number of children. Teachers or caregivers, on the other hand, have universalistic expectations of children, partly because of their secondary relationships with them and because of the large number of children they serve. Whereas parents will be committed to their children for a lifetime, the generalized relationship between

teachers and children becomes a protective kind of interaction that makes it possible for the two "to decathect each other at the end of the year" (p. 35). Finally, she noted that parents desire special individualized attention for their children, whereas teachers struggle to establish an environment of more or less equalized attention for all children. She concluded that part of the distrust between parents and caregivers originates from the real differences in perspective that are a result of the definitions of their cultural and social roles.

Hess et al. (1981) echoed this view by noting that mother/child interaction stems from a longer interpersonal history, involves a larger variety of interactional contexts, and carries more complex emotional connotations, not only ones that influence caretaking behaviors. They further emphasized the public nature of interactions in the child care setting as opposed to the private dyadic nature of interactions in the home. They, too, believe that differences between parents and caregivers can be partially explained by normative definitions of the two roles.

Long and Garduque (1987) found that mothers and family day care providers described several dimensions of discontinuity between homes and day care, yet both groups reported that continuity existed. The researchers explained this apparent contradiction by noting that mothers did not expect caregivers to act like mothers, and in a sense, they approved of the differences between home and day care. Caregivers did not see themselves as surrogate mothers, and, therefore, did not act like mothers. There was tacit agreement and acceptance of each other's

role. A lack of agreement would be a source of conflict that would most likely result in confusion for the child.

The authors asserted that the usefulness of applying the term "discontinuity" to the home/day care relationship should be re-examined, since it is an accepted part of the day care experience. They acknowledge that children may very well experience discontinuity in terms of different interactions and role expectations, but believe that it may not be problematic for most children, if it is free of conflict, as it may teach them to adjust to social demands in the variety of settings as they move from the home into the wider social world. In a similar vein, Lightfoot (1981) pointed out that family-school dissonance might be perceived as a vehicle of creative, adaptive development for children in a changing world. She noted, however, the importance of distinguishing between "creative conflict" and "negative dissonance."

One of the problems in sorting out this issue is that the spheres of influence of parents and caregivers are not clearly delineated, e.g., tensions may develop from ambiguity about who has the right to govern certain areas of the child's life (Lightfoot, 1975; Shapiro, 1977). Caregivers may feel that they have the right to autonomy in their day-to-day interactions with children, and parents may feel the need to reserve their right to scrutiny. Fein (1980) noted that contemporary parents are achieving presence on a territory that was once deemed exclusively professional, and professionals are gaining unprecedented access to the home. Katz (1980) saw this as a potential source of problems. For example, when child care practitioners are committed to

respect parental values and input, they may be faced with having to choose between their own preferences (often the result of education and experience) and the child's home demands. Katz underscored the ethical dilemmas in parent/caregiver relationships, and noted that a greater alliance between the two is likely to intensify them.

Indeed, it seems logical that complete continuity between parents and caregivers is impossible to achieve and probably not desirable. A certain amount of discontinuity is most likely a natural phenomenon, given the difference in social roles and the differences between the two settings. In fact, children bring about a certain amount of discontinuity themselves because they behave differently in the two environments (Long & Garduque, 1987). The discrepancies between home and day care may even bring some benefits for the child, given certain conditions. Parents and caregivers must be clear about one another's roles, accepting of the difference between them, and at least agree on important overriding values (Long & Garduque, 1987). If these conditions are met, conflict should be minimal. Much more research is needed, however, to determine what effects the parent/caregiver relationship has on children.

What Should Day Care Be?

Day care can no longer be viewed either as a compensatory mechanism for inadequate parenting nor as a deviant form of childrearing, and thus, disruptive to family life. Remnants of both views remain (Powell, 1987), even though the client population is diverse in many respects. At its minimum, day care is a place for children to be while parents work or attend school. At best, it represents both a supplement to and support for the family. Clearly, day care has not fully evolved as a viable family support system, though several researchers have noted the need for that perspective (Peters & Benn, 1980; Peters & Klein, 1981; Powell, 1987).

Parents' and Caregivers' Views

In almost every study that has assessed perceptions of day care, larger percentages of caregivers than parents have viewed day care as a family support system. Further, caregivers have been consistently less satisfied with the level of parent involvement than parents themselves have been. It seems, therefore, that there is a discrepancy among parents' and caregivers' views as to what day care is and what it ought to be.

Romero and Thomas (1975) reported that, overall, parents did not view day care as an extension of the family system. A survey by Holloman and Zaccaria (1977) revealed that only 48% of the parent sample agreed with the statement, "Day care strengthens and assists the family." The National Day Care Study (Abt Asociates, 1979) reported

that few parents were willing to discuss the home environment with caregivers. Only about half of Powell's (1977a) parent sample considered day care as a source of information about childrearing. In 1983, Gram and Hanson surveyed 166 dual career intact families. The respondents viewed parenting as the purview of the parent, with the exception of teaching the child cognitive skills and fostering physical health. Paid child care facilities were low on their list of preferred community-based resources for parenting, lower than relatives and the church, in spite of the fact that parents were dissatisfied with their current sources of support for parenting. The authors concluded that parents expect a great deal from schools and very little from child care facilities.

The results of Pool's (1976) study are somewhat more encouraging. His responses from 201 parents indicated that a linkage between the family and the day care center would be viewed as positive. Ninety percent of his sample felt that the child care staff were helping them care for their children, and if they remained at home, they could not provide all the experiences the child was receiving through day care. The parents felt that child care staff should have training in child development and be able to help parents with problematic behaviors as they arose. Interestingly, parents who had low marital adjustment were least supportive of expanding the services of the child care center.

This raises the issue that parents' expectations of day care will vary tremendously because individuals and their circumstances vary so. Powell (1977a) created a typology of parent/caregiver relationships by

analyzing the differences among communication frequency subgroups. The parents he called "independent" maintained significant social distance from the center and viewed day care and the family as independent childrearing systems. This group had low frequency of communication with caregivers, little or no discussion of family issues, and had strong attitudes that childrearing values and family information should not be discussed with caregivers. The "dependent" parents viewed the child care center as an information source, but the communication was unidirectional, rather than reciprocal. Finally, the "interdependent" parents reflected considerable intersection between the family and the child care center. They had high frequencies of communication, discussed childrearing values and family information with caregivers, and they believed that these topics were appropriate. Powell's data support the contention that parents vary considerably in their perceptions of what day care ought to be. However, he made no effort to determine if the children of these different types of parents had different experiences either at home or in the day care center.

Foundations of a Parent/Caregiver Alliance

This paper has thus far led us to some rather unacceptable conclusions: little discontinuity between parents and child caregivers exists, it does not seem to harm the children, and parents do not expect day care to be more than it already is. There is a simple explanation for these anti-intuitive findings. Much of the research has been conducted in high quality, often university-based centers. The parents are likely thrilled that their children are enrolled, even if they never communicate with the staff enough to disagree. But much day care in this nation is not of high quality, and it is safe to say that the majority of parents who use child care worry very much about how their children are spending their days. These parents do not have the opportunity to choose caregivers who share their values -- their "choice" is limited to a center that is open the hours they need care, one that they can afford, and one that has an opening.

We will not discount the research, but will continue on the indisputable premise that parental involvement in all aspects of a young child's socialization is beneficial. Research on parent/school collaboration is a major source of testimony. This body of literature is much larger than that on day care, and the findings are much more in agreement. Results suggest that parent involvement is related to gains in student achievement and to self-concept (cited in Institute for Responsive Education, no date) as well as to improved attitudes (Kagan,

1984). One review study in IRE indicated that almost any kind of regular parent/school contact makes a difference.

For preschool children, the assumption that parent involvement is valuable has also been substantiated. Much of the evidence comes from studies of Head Start, which translated the parent participation principle into specific guidelines. The philosophy that parents are the primary educators and socializers of their children led Head Start to develop formal and informal methods of parent involvement to help them create more stimulating home and school environments. Evaluations of Head Start and similar programs have shown parent and child gains on a number of measures, gains which were still evident years afterward (Lazar, Darlington, Murray, Royce, and Snipper, 1982).

Head Start has shown the value of parent involvement so clearly that the principle was written into the Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements. When two versions of these standards failed to become law, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1984) instituted its own voluntary accreditation program for day care centers. Like the FIDCR, these guidelines recognize and promote the value of a partnership between parents and caregivers.

It appears, then, that a meaningful alliance between parents and caregivers is not only desirable, but possible to achieve. Yet the research reviewed above gives few guidelines as to how good centers can bring harmony to the home/day care relationship. Some elements of school and Head Start experiences with parent participation may be

adaptable to the child care setting, but these would require much field testing. At this time, more study is needed to close the gaps in existing information and address more specifically the components of a good parent/caregiver relationship.

A potent problem for such research is the diversity of settings which offer child care and the diverse clientele served by individual facilities. What works in a day care center may be inappropriate for a group or family day care home. Opportunities for parental contact may be very different in a center that serves infants than in one that provides preschool or latchkey care. Investigators must clearly delineate their target areas so that their findings can be suitably applied.

Silhouette of the Partnership

There can be no parent/caregiver relationship without some form of parental participation in the child care setting. There are several vehicles that can provide this participation, and the hodgepodge of research findings hints that some may be more successful than others. For example, it is only logical that even the best child care center can profit from increased parental input. Yet most research indicates that decision making is the area that involves the fewest number of parents, and it is their least popular choice (Abt Associates, 1979; Cohen, Sonnenschein, & Peters, 1973; Conroy, 1980; Rodes & Moore, 1975). Similarly, when parent education programs have been attempted in day care, attendance has been minimal.

We have previously noted that parents' expectations of day care centers show considerable variation, and many parents may not feel the need for these types of involvement. There are data, however, which show that parents are willing to participate in activities that place them in direct contact with their children (Das, 1980; Rodes & Moore, 1975; Stewart & Stone, 1977). We must recognize that many parents experience guilt from placing their children in day care, guilt which might be assuaged by this type of participation. Perhaps this is why the role most widely assumed by day care parents is that of resource provider; that is, parents help with fundraising, maintenance of equipment, building and/or contributing materials, volunteering in the classroom, attending field trips and other special activities, etc.

The research we reviewed is clear that the most common type of parental involvement is through informal communication with caregivers. These exchanges naturally occur at drop-off and pick-up times. Studies might address ways to facilitate these opportunities. For example, how could primary caregivers be more available to parents at transition times, free from other responsibilities so that sharing of information is possible? We must also look at the effectiveness of other ways which might encourage communication, e.g., social events such as potluck suppers or holiday parties, or center policies which allow parents to drop in and visit at any time of day. Another queston is how the rate of staff turnover affects dyadic communication between parents and caregivers (Pettygrove, 1987). Also important is how to train caregivers to convey a genuine commitment to an alliance with parents.

More formal communication between center and home is much more rare. We wonder if regularly scheduled conferences between primary caregivers and parents can be used to bolster their relationship. It is likely that in most cases staff only schedule conferences to discuss problems, and parents only ask for a conference when they have a grievance. This could only maximize rather than reduce the distance between parents and staff. It would be enlightening to study centers which use regular meetings as a means of mutual sharing about the child's experiences and development.

Obstacles to Parent/Caregiver Alliance

The formation of a true alliance between homes and day care facilities will face many obstacles. The question, "Are we expecting too much of parents?" must be asked. Conversely, we must consider if we are asking too little.

The most obvious hindrance is that most parents who use day care are working parents and thus have very limited time. A genuine acceptance of parents' limitations and prioritites will be an essential prerequisite. Another impediment is that there is not enough day care in this nation to serve all of the children in need, and much of what is available is either unaffordable or of questionable quality. This means that many parents cannot select child care settings that match their expectations, so they do not make a personal commitment. Many parents are relieved to find any day care at all, and may shun involvement since they are uneasy with the arrangement. In fact, one study suggested that

parents find it exceedingly difficult to admit that they are leaving their child in a setting which may have deficiencies (Browne, 1984). Independent assessments of several dimensions of six child care centers were made by the researcher and by parents using each center. Most parents rated their own center as close to ideal, and all parent assessments were higher than those of the professional. If parents do not have any degree of choice in child care, they may behave more like silent prisoners than active participants.

We must also realize the limitations of caregivers, who are the other half of this partnership. In the absence of government or private sector support, many day care centers are forced to hire personnel with minimal training and experience in order to provide services that parents can afford. Therefore, many providers lack adequate preparation in working with children, let alone working with parents. Often staff turnover is high because of low salaries and insufficient benefits. For these caregivers, resources are simply not available to create meaningful relationships with parents of the type we have described. We must find solutions to providing caregivers with adequate training and recompense. When the child care profession achieves credibility, and overall quality and quantity of child care are improved, opportunities for a rich partnership will be enhanced.

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